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ABSTRACT

This report overviews the rationale for conducting an ethnographic study of cultural factors that influence student aspiration in Tremont, a small rural community on Mount Desert Island, Maine. Although Tremont is the poorest community on Mount Desert Island, Tremont students scored as well or better on the Maine Educational Assessment than did students from more affluent communities. However, although the high school graduation rate of Tremont students is high, relatively few students go on to postsecondary education. This report details the process of an ethnographic case study and summarizes several anthropological and sociological theories about rural communities and their culture. Tentative conclusions include: cultural anthropology can identify factors that affect the way students learn; ethnography is useful in understanding the ways in which a particular culture affects students; triangulating ethnography with a quantitative approach provides useful data for policy development; the close connection between Tremont and its elementary school reflects the integrity and homogeneity of the community; the local culture of Tremont does not value postsecondary education as highly as secondary education; tensions divide year-round residents and summer residents; the availability of "inherited jobs" such as caretaking and fishing deter some students from seeking postsecondary education; cultural norms and values influence students' decisions about postsecondary education; and cultural differences between teachers and students make it difficult for them to appreciate each other. Appendices include information on workers in Tremont, valuation and tax spending of Mount Desert Island communities, dropout rates for Mount Desert Island communities, and student intentions to pursue postsecondary education. Includes tables, graphs, and a bibliography. (LP)

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WORKING MEMORY:
An Ethnographic Case Study of the Influence of Culture on Education

by Barbara Kent Lawrence

A Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the
National Rural Education Association
San Antonio, Texas, October 13, 1996

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Executive Summary:

In this paper I offer a very brief introduction to the community of Tremont, Maine (augmented by tables and charts in the Appendix) and the idea that culture influences student aspirations. I show how the ethnographic case study method in conjunction with quantitative analysis can illuminate our understanding of a community. I then suggest how the perspectives of researchers in anthropology and sociology can provide a framework for analysis of rural communities and rural education. Finally, I offer tentative conclusions.

Working Memory:
An Ethnographic Case Study of the Influence of Culture on Education

"It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards."
Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass

Statement of the Problem

Students from Tremont do very well on the Maine Educational Assessment tests consistently outperforming The Department of Education's projections based socio-economic status (Chart 1). In fact, students from Tremont often score as well or even better than students from the much more affluent island town of Mount Desert even though Tremont is the poorest, most traditional community on Mount Desert Island (Table One). However, in 1990 76% of Tremont citizens over the age of twenty-five were high school graduates in comparison with 83% of residents of Hancock County and only 12.4 percent of Tremont's residents hold an advanced degree, a figure well below the rate for Hancock County of 21.4% .[1]

The gap between completion of high school and a post-secondary degree is also a problem statewide. Analysts have noted that " too few Maine young people have the depth of skill and breadth of vision required to take advantage of the changes occurring in the Maine economy", changes that require advanced education even to maintain existing occupational and

[1] In Maine, only 33% of those who hold an MA or higher are native-born, 67% of those who hold such degrees are from out-of-state.

financial levels (Sherwood, 1987: 16). Nor is this a new problem. " In 1957, Maine ranked fifteenth among the states in the percentage of its young people completing secondary school, but only thirty-ninth in those finishing four or more years of college. Few states had such a gap between the two figures (Condon, 1995: 544). In 1990 Maine ranked 18th among the states in the percentage of its students completing high school and 27th in the number completing college. The gap had narrowed, but unfortunately the percentage does not distinguish between young people who are from families that have recently migrated to the state and those who are native-born (Condon, interview: August 13, 1996).

This gap has implications for students that are financial and personal as employers demand higher levels of education in employees and the price of staying on Mount Desert Island increases. The costs of living on the island are escalating under pressure of in-migrants to the island, many of whom come to take professional and managerial jobs for which they are qualified by advanced degrees. Less educated native-born people from Tremont are finding it increasingly difficult to compete for jobs and continue to live on Mount Desert Island.

I do not think we can easily explain the gaps between success in primary school, completion of high school and post-secondary education. As noted, Tremont students do very well on the MEA, and graduate from high school at a relatively high rate, therefore, it seems they are academically qualified to go on to higher education. Limited financial ability may play a part in a young person's

decision not to pursue an advanced degree, however, I know through anecdotal evidence, that some young people turn down scholarships and others do not take advantage of generous loan programs. I think we must look at the way the culture defines aspirations and the relationship of that culture to the culture of "people from away" for an explanation of this gap.

I think it is important to study the influence of culture on aspirations at this particular moment in our history. As the formal barriers to equal opportunity have been removed, over the past forty years, there has been a growing interest among social scientists and policy-makers in the role of "informal barriers" to opportunities. Cultural norms that define as appropriate aspirations limited to traditional ways of earning a living may be barriers to higher education. Traits and behavior promoted by a culture may, unintentionally, curtail a student's success throughout school.

Looking at how students from a small town in Maine deal with conflicting demands from their families, community, school, society and nation will further our understanding of how minority students create meaning in their lives and invest themselves in their futures. And, it may, incidentally, force us to question the values of the dominant culture based on " getting and spending."

It is my hope that my study will contribute both to our understanding of aspirations and to strategies for helping minority students. By looking at ways in which rural students in Tremont define their aspirations and attempt to achieve them, I hope to better understand the importance of culture and cultural

context as students make meaning of their lives and plan for their futures. My greater hope is that I can suggest policies to maximize successful strategies these students have found.

"Nobody who followed the scientific method ever discovered anything interesting"

Wolcott, 1990:32[2]

I am creating a holistic picture or narrative of Tremont, Maine in order to show how its culture influences decisions students make about post-secondary education. To answer the question, I am gathering data from a wide range of people , historical records, photographs, census figures and other sources. In answering my question, I am telling the story of a small town in Maine and people who have lived through the past fifty years of extraordinary change.

Overview of Research Methodology and Rationale

I am doing an ethnographic case study using qualitative and quantitative research methods. The open-ended ethnographic method allows me to research influences on aspirations and motivations in a broad and yet deep way. I am developing a holistic view of a culture and society through interviews with experts in education and people familiar with the culture of Tremont, Maine. In addition I am holding focus groups of parents and teachers and community members, taking life histories of older members of the community and recent

[2] Attributed to Paul Weiss and originally quoted in Keesing and Keesing, 1971: 10.

students from Tremont, and relating my findings to the history and culture of the area. This method helps me address my research question by giving students an opportunity to speak for themselves as well as by situating their responses within the culture and history of the community (Merriam, 1988; Wolcott, 1995; Van Maanen,1995). Working under the guidance of Dr. Russell J. Quaglia Director of the National Center for Student Aspirations at the University of Maine, Orono, I will triangulate my data through an adapted version of the 105 question survey developed by the National Center for Student Aspirations.

Apologia for Ethnography:

Case study: Sharan Merriam writes that "the qualitative case study can be defined as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon , or social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources (Merriam, 1988: 16). She adds that " an ethnographic case study...is more than an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a social unit or phenomenon. It is a sociocultural analysis of the unit of study" due to its "concern with the cultural context" (Merriam, 1988: 23).

Mine is an ethnographic case study because it describes a small town in a resort community of rural Maine using data from multiple sources and relies on induction, moving from the particular to the general. It is heuristic because I have been reflecting on my impressions of this island since I was a child,

though my methods may recently have become more sophisticated. This is a "socio-cultural analysis" because I think culture plays an important part in channeling aspirations and that the cultural context helps people make meaning of their lives.

I have four reasons for attempting an ethnographic case study of students in Tremont, Maine in order to understand how they formed their own aspirations. The first is that too often, studies of learning have focused entirely on what happens between the teacher and the learner. As Wolcott suggests " the emphasis in most school ethnographies is almost entirely on classroom life. There is much that researchers do not know about the lives of those they study... Anthropology and education : seems to have focused unduly on schools and given too little attention to education in broader cultural context (Wolcott, 1988:44). I hope to learn how students make decisions about education and aspirations in that "broader cultural context."

The second is that I hope the qualitative nature of my data will complement the work of The National Center for Student Aspirations, which focuses on in-school practice primarily through quantitative analysis. I propose to study the context or culture in which students live and ways it influences in their decisions about post-secondary education. This perspective is justified by Wolcott's suggestion: " In our call for more anthropological attention to learning, I think attention should be focused on learning that occurs in natural settings rather than on learning done in schools... (Wolcott 1988:44).

Third, I believe that by collecting data from older members of the community, and by describing the culture, I can add to our understanding of the ways in which cultures change over time and that transmission of culture from one generation to another is affected by change. I think that life histories are an appropriate way to illuminate these changes for the same reasons Robert Redfield suggested:

> ...it seems to me that the biographic form of description provides a direct entry into problems of social change. The respects in which a community is not one stable and self-consistent structure, but is changing from some manner of life to another, appear most plainly in the changing states of mind of people, or in the differences between what older people think and feel and what younger people think and feel. We might therefore attempt a comparison of the careers of older people and of younger. This could be done by obtaining the life stories of representatives of each generation.
>
> Redfield, 1960:60

Life histories, aided by focus groups and interviews with experts in the fields of education and areas related to Downeast, Maine, paint a portrait of Tremont as it moves from memories of its older residents to the present.

Fourth, ethnography is appropriate because I want to understand, how the culture in which they live influences students choices about what they do after high school. Ethnography requires that I describe the cultural context in detail sufficient to allow the reader to see, as I have, the elements that have helped shape reality for these students and guided them as they made meaning of their lives. Ethnography is the appropriate method for this undertaking because " the underlying rationale for doing ethnography is understood to be

cultural interpretation.....how culture influences without controlling" (Wolcott , 1995:83). These reasons for choosing the ethnographic case study will guide my research.

SELF-AWARENESS OF THE ETHNOGRAPHER

In qualitative research the ethnographer is the primary instrument of investigation. Though for years, the social sciences have tried to cloak dependence on the "social relations skills of the researcher" (Ball, 1990 :165 - but out of context) with artifices like use of the third person and the passive voice, the reality is that the trained researcher, acknowledging her or his own culture, limitations and strengths, may be as capable of "scientific method" as the quantitative researcher wielding surveys based on easily manipulated inputs. Just because interpretation is rendered in numbers doesn't mean it is correct. As in qualitative studies, the data may be based on answers to questions that may have been poorly framed, confusing, irrelevant or even absent, and the unasked question might have been the most important.

Ethnography acknowledges that the investigator chooses elements upon which to base interpretation, and is , therefore, the key research tool. As stated in the 1960s by Charles Frake, the task of description is not to "recount the events of a society but to specify what one must know to make those events maximally probable (Wolcott , 1995: 83. The challenge is not to lay out everything in the order in which it happened but to find patterns, and support

interpretation with specific data so that we can anticipate , within acceptable range , how someone in a similar circumstance might react.

Not only is self-awareness imperative in interpretation of data, it is critical in the gathering of data. Differences in gender, age, and "world view" may prejudice the way informants respond and narrow the aperture through which they allow the researcher to peer into their world. However, I wonder if the researcher can be all things to all people, can neutralize his or her own personality and presentation of self to disarm informants and learn from all with equal effectiveness. Perhaps, we can only celebrate our differences, look for our commonalities, and acknowledge that we as individual researchers, see a world of others through our own distorting lens. As Ball asks " If someone else did the fieldwork would the ethnography have turned out differently? The answer to that must be 'yes.' But it is a qualified yes. I believe that the differences between my analysis and yours typically would be small rather than large" (Ball, 1990: 167).

My own entree to my community of fieldwork is predicated in large part on the fact that I have gotten to know and be known in this community over many years. Though I too can put on a cloak of scientific neutrality, I still wear the costumes of mother, business owner, friend, volunteer, person "from away," as well as many others some of which are negative and of which I am unaware. If I were not known to this community, I would not enjoy the access I have. But I can not cast off my multiple identities, nor would I try.

POWER OF THE ETHNOGRAPHER

We think too little about the power an ethnographer has in collecting , analyzing and interpreting data. Again, certain artifices have grown to shield us from this power. We write in the third person passive about communities that don't exist and about people without names because they are innocent and we must protect them. But then as readers we try to figure out where Doc and his Norton boys stood on the "Street Corner" , where Plainville really is, or who was "Deep Throat." I believe it might be more honest and in fact , more protective of the innocent, to identify them and their community.

Power also may color questions and answers. If I were a teacher in the school, asking these questions of my students surely the fact that I could punish with a poor grade might distort their answers. But though in the role of ethnographer I have no such overt power, I do represent a class and category of people, summer people, who are perceived as powerful, and to whom only the "right answers" are given, the ones they are interpreted to want. I hope that because I have lived in this community for a long time I can both ask the questions and receive the answers in a way to minimize this distortion.

REFLEXIVITY

Ball defines reflexivity as " the conscious and deliberate linking of the social process of engagement in the field with the technical processes of data

collection and the decisions that that linking involves." He thinks that "this kind of self-conscious engagement with the world is what defines the process of ethnography, " the same process, as he notes, that George Herbert Mead called the "internal conversation" (Ball, 1990:159. He suggests that reflexivity emphasizes "the social skills and creative intelligence of the fieldworker...in contrast to technical competence" (Ball, 1990:157).

Reflexivity presupposes that the researcher is aware of his or her role and effect of his or her presence in the field, and of his or her ability, in fact, requirement to make choices. Therefore, the researcher in ethnography must select what is noticed, then described, analyzed and interpreted, and finally selected as evidence to support *(underlie)* theory and policy recommendations.

Jacobsen reminds us , however, that though Geertz describes reflexivity as an "I-witness approach to the construction of cultural descriptions (1988:78) bringing together 'fieldwork as personal encounter and ethnography as reliable account'(1988:84)...a serious limitation of reflexive ethnography...is that it confuses the process of discovery with that of verification "(Jacobsen, 1991:116).

FORM

I care about words and writing, and I hope this threads through my paper, sewing it together with strands of different color and texture. Several ethnographers notably Geertz, Wolcott , Jacobsen and Van Maanen, write about

the writing of ethnography. They suggest that the writer use the first person because "to write the researcher out of the report is to deny the dependency of the data on the researcher's presence" (Wolcott, 1990:28; Ball: 170). I use the first person because I do not want to shield myself behind false barriers in order to feign distance and disinterest. I use the active voice because I believe that in writing this narrative I am engaged "passionately"[3] and actively and must take responsibility for that engagement.

The form and presentation of this study matter to me and I have tried to follow not only my own sensibilities but the wisdom of other writers I admire. I agree with Wolcott's assertion that:

> Narrative links sociology to literature and to history...narrative is the best way to understand the human experience because it is the way humans understand their lives. It is the closest to the human experience and hence the least falsifying of that experience. ...If we wish to understand the deepest and most universal of human experiences, if we wish our work to be faithful to the lived experiences of people, if we wish for a union between poetics and science , or if we wish to use our privileges and skills to empower the people we study, then we *should* value the narrative.
>
> Wolcott , 1995:218 (in Van Maanen)

Narrative is, of course, only suitable for telling part of the story, but I have tried to follow Wolcott's advice not to let the hand of analysis become too heavy (Wolcott , 1990:28).

Van Maanen describes a subgenre of ethnography he calls "impressionist tales" (Van Maanen, 1988: 106). I find this useful justification for inclusion of a

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[3] This reflects my agreement with Jules Henry who acknowledged he was writing "passionate" ethnography.

form of writing not usually found in a paper of this sort: the short story. My stories are based on incidents I witnessed and in which I participated. However, because, in many cases, I gathered this data before I knew I was looking for data, they are only impressions. I include them as Sketches of Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter, to weave a subplot under the basic narrative, a weft holding the fabric of the text together. Van Maanen adds that " to recognize the poetic dimension of ethnography does not require one gives up facts and accurate accounting for the supposed freeplay of poetry. Poetry is not limited to romantic or modernist subjectivism; it can be historical, precise, objective (Van Maanen, 101). Though I dare not call these sketches poetic, I hope they will add to the context of my story.

ANALYSIS: Through Thick and Thin

Geertz' distinction between "thick" and "thin" descriptions is quoted relentlessly, however, it seems important here to remind both myself and my reader that he intended this distinction not to suggest greater length. [4]Jacobsen reminds us " Thin description depicts behaviors in the sense of physical motions, as seen, for example, by the eye of a camera; in contrast, thick description reveals its significance" (Jacobsen, 1991:7) Geertz notes Ryle's distinction between the involuntary twitching of an eye, the various possible interpretations

[4] Geertz attributes the original discussion of "thick description" and the example of a wink to Gilbert Ryle.

of winks and " winks upon winks upon winks" (Geertz, 1973:9). I have attempted, in this ethnography, to understand the winks.

In looking for the meaning behind these 'winks,' I have, to paraphrase Fortes, broken " up the empirical sequence and concomitance of custom and social relations and group[ed them]...in categories of general import (Fortes, 1970: 132 , Jacobsen, 1991:7). In this way I move the data from a recounting of observation to a level of analysis and interpretation, and although I hope most other trained observers would have noted the same types of events over time that would have led them to the same observations and interpretations, I can not be sure.

ETHNOGRAPHY AS ARGUMENT:

Ethnographies do have a point of view and mine is no different. I believe that culture, everything passed on through learning, has powerful impact on education, and that "the educational system of a community constitutes an important vehicle for the transmission of culture" (Warren,1987 [Spindler] :120). This interaction is a process, one that produces change which , in turn, influences action and reaction.

In Tremont, as in the small rural West German village Warren studied,

> "the schools are confronted with a perplexing dilemma. The present form and content of education constitute a symbol of

> cultural stability and continuity, but as a positive force effecting constructive adjustment to change, they are less functional. To sustain a functionally effective role in the community the schools must adjust to the demands of cultural change but at a pace and in a way that will not jeopardize their contribution to cultural maintenance.
>
> Warren,1987: 121

My province then, is one of process, change, action, reaction and interaction between all the people who influence students.

My job is to describe and analyze the influences that play a role in the decisions students from Tremont make about post-secondary education. Surely these include the community, the schools, families, the culture of Maine and in particular of Downeast Maine as it manifests itself in the peculiar circumstances of Mount Desert Island, and of the larger national and international culture brought to the island by the media and in the persons of over 3.5 million visitors and summer residents.

There are two major styles of ethnography: "structural and cultural (or symbolic) studies [which deal] with modes of thought, and functional, or processual , and logistical (or praxis) ethnographies [which] deal with modes of action" (Jacobsen, 1991: 23). These two modes overlap and one could devise a continuum on which to fit anthropologists writing in variations of these modes. For example, Robert Redfield, while closely allied with his mentor Raymond Firth in delineating the importance of social structure, also sees the importance of process and change. As he moved to describing peasant communities instead of primitive societies relatively untouched by civilization, Redfield moved the

concept of "social structure" to "ecological system," in which the parts inter-relate, adapting to an environment both physical and psychological.

Fredrik Barth, departed further from the path of structural anthropology, even while acknowledging the importance of structure, to follow process. In studying process Barth describes cultures in organizational terms, but asks how people within the culture make decisions. He looks at the constraints that limit choices and at the norms and values that encourage other decisions.

Barth argues that "local variation in a traditional civilization is not a surface disturbance, to be covered over by generalization or tidied away by a typology. It is a ubiquitous feature of great civilizations, and we should make it a major component of our description and characterization of these societies rather than a difficulty to be overcome" (Barth, 1993:3). He suggests a method for accomplishing this:

> First, we must break loose from our root metaphor of society as a system of articulated parts. The image is too simple, and it misleads: we must look for another model... I hold that when we can see society as characterized by a degree of conceptual and statistical order, this must reflect the results of processes-processes that arise from particular combinations of ideas, material circumstance, and interactional potentials and have patterning as their consequences. The image of processes serves us better than that of a structure or a closed system.. After all, we generally recognize by now that we are speaking of a reality that is at least in significant part socially and cultural constructed.....Our focus should be on the processes of social and cultural construction of reality, which are always here and now.
>
> Barth: 1993, 3

I find these ideas compelling and appropriate for a study of decision-making about aspirations in a small township in rural Maine. Not only is Tremont a particular variant of Maine culture, but it is the processes of decision-making that are key to understanding how to create programs and policies that may effect change.

At the risk of sounding like yet another variation of a modernist let me suggest that the image of culture and our place within it can be seen as a social "Internet": a web of infinite connections and possibilities but through which we only travel once. Our entry point makes some choices more likely but not inevitable, but in the selection or accident of choosing our path we define and re-define the remainder of our route.

FRAMES OF REFERENCE:

Ferdinand Tonnies

Ferdinand Toennies, the German sociologist (1855-1936) was not the first to distinguish between two basic forms of social organization, but the distinctions and names he used, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft,* community and society, have endured. Confucius, Aristotle, Plato, Ibn Khaldun, and others had discussed "two modes of mentality and behavior, ...as two different types of society" (Toennies, 19 : ix) and Durkheim, Redfield and many others would continue the discussion, but we must credit Toennies with clarifying and elaborating the distinction.

In part, the distinction is based on the differences between a rural, peasant society and modern capitalistic society centered in cities. Toennies saw the progression or change from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* cultures as natural but not irreversible. It is interesting to note that he foresaw the excesses of the *Gesellschaft* culture, as we are living them out today, and predicted that people might turn away from overly regulated and alienating societies, seeking again the "natural " bonds of family, land and other ties.

Gemeinschaft and *Gesellschaft* are ideal types and, as such, represent poles on a continuum. What then are the important distinctions that characterize these two appositional types ?

1) "Gemeinschaft types of society have a traditionally defined fund of knowledge handed down as conclusive and final; they are not concerned with discovering new ideas or extending their spheres of knowledge. Any effort to test the traditional knowledge , insofar as it implies doubt, is ruled out on moral grounds." (Toennies: 28)

2) Gesellschaft types of organization institutionalize techniques for the attainment and codification of knowledge. In such a group the methods are primarily epistemological and critical: the mode of thought nominalistic." (Toennies: 28).

3. Life in a Gemeinschaft culture centers around the family and through the extended family and clan to other members of the village. Often the land itself binds the people through shared economic concerns (efforts?) Statuses are

ascribed at birth, and there is a fixed body of needs. Rarely, until introduced from the outside, do people crave goods they can not provide for themselves, having too much or "getting ahead", goes against social norms. Because there is a small number of people to draw upon, individuals often play many roles, further binding them together as a unit.

4. In the larger Gesellschaft society, people do not know each other as well, extended families may be fractured because economic commitments are more important than familial ones, needs can not be fulfilled by small units and many new or derived needs are created, in part to keep the economy active. People begin to look to the state for assistance rather than to family.

Certainly I am not doing justice to Toennies complete explication of these differences, nor is that my intention. However, I think it is useful to point out that Toennies, and others before him, had distinguished between the characteristics of rural communities and urban societies because we can still find these distinctions, though blurred by increased contact with *Gesellschaft* society, in the rural people of Tremont, Maine. We will look next at how Robert Redfield further developed the portrait of rural characteristics.

Robert Redfield: The Peasant Community

Though the work of Robert Redfield may be "out-of-fashion" perhaps because terminology he used now sounds dated, I think his insights are useful, not only as markers on a trail, but in and of themselves. Redfield described the

"little community" of peasant society as distinct from the "primitive world" in part because of its relationship with the larger society. The characteristics he identified in some peasant societies, though not all, still seem applicable to the rural community of Tremont.

Redfield calls the peasant community "small, homogeneous, self-sufficient" (Redfield, 1960a: 4) and quotes Kroeber's observation that "peasants are definitely rural - yet live in relation to market towns; ... form[ing] a class segment of a larger population which usually contains urban centers, sometimes metropolitan capitals. They constitute part-societies with part-culture" (Redfield, 1960b:19). Peasant societies draw their stability from a close, long-term and frequently "mystical" relationship to the land (or the source of sustenance), from their immediate and extended families, and communities (Redfield, 1960b: 61). In addition, most peasants respect hard work, particularly agricultural work, looking distrustfully at commerce, and scorning people in towns as lazy and easily tired by physical work. Rural peasants almost universally find " a social attitude toward work, a satisfaction in working long and hard in the fields, a disinclination to adventure or to speculate...a distaste for violence, [and] a disfavor of prowess in any form of conspicuous aggressiveness. Remarking that "others might not accept even the following modified statement" Redfield sums up peasant characteristics as follows: "an intense attachment to native soil, a reverent disposition toward habitat and ancestral ways; a restraint on individual self-seeking in favor of family and community; a certain suspiciousness, mixed

with appreciation, of town life; a sober and earthy ethic" (Redfield, 1996psc:78) : characteristics we will find in Tremont, Maine.[5]

The peasant is affected by his or her proximity to the larger society and culture of town, city and nation. Institutions, including the school, may be intrusions into the village, originating outside of it but bound in varying degrees to the life of the community (Redfield , 1960a: 42). Interaction with such institutions has profound effect on the "little community." The peasant may also come into contact with the larger society through the market or in the person of a member of the local educated elite or "intelligentsia." This local elite may, in fact, mediate between the two societies (Redfield, 1960a: 38 - 41).[6]

To Redfield the peasant culture is a half-culture reflecting the larger culture to which it responds. " It is an aspect or dimension of the civilization of which it is a part... . In contrast to a "primitive" society, the peasant society "requires continual communication to the local community of thought originating outside of it...[and] the peasant village invites us to attend to the long course of interaction between that community and centers of civilization (Redfield, 1960a:40). Citing George Foster he adds that "one of the most obvious distinctions between truly primitive societies and folk [peasant] societies is that the latter , over hundreds of years, have had constant contact with the centers of intellectual thought and development. (Redfield, 1960a:40).

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[5] In a similar way Edward Shils has written about "The Primary Group" as "a group characterized by a high degree of solidarity, informality in the code of rules which regulate the behavior of its members , and autonomy in the creation of theses rules." (Shils, 1951: 44).

[6] See Lawrence, 1995, "What the Red Squirrel is to the Gray: A Study of School Board Composition on Mount Desert Island, Maine."

This contact can have a powerful influence in forming and re-forming the self-concept of the peasant as well as the members of the dominant society with whom he comes into contact. The self-concept of the peasant is defined in part by his or her relationship to people who are perceived to be more powerful, affluent, mobile, and educated. However, the peasant's image of himself includes seeing the townspeople as less attached to family and land, weaker physically and morally. " The townsman or the gentry form an aspect of the local moral life - form it by reflection, by the presence of example, by the model these outsiders offer, whether that model be one the peasant seeks to imitate or to avoid or whether he merely recognizes both its likeness to and its difference from his own ideas (Redfield, 1960b: 75).

Redfield discusses the effect of change which is so much more pronounced in the peasant society than in a more static "primitive" culture. Of particular interest is Redfield's discussion of the difficulty of transmitting culture between three living generations when what once 'worked' no longer does. He points to the conservatism in such cultures which may help us understand both the success of the school in Tremont, and the reluctance of its children to extend their education beyond high school.

Redfield also shows that as cultures react to changing circumstances and opportunities old statuses and roles are lost and new ones created. Advice of elders becomes outdated and maladaptive. He cites Firth statement that "the ideals of many people were still much as before, and even some of their earlier

expectations lingered on" (Redfield, 1960a:30-34). We might call this phenomenon "social skeumorphism," where a trait persists in ornamental design long after it has lost its utilitarian value.7

Some aspects of a culture, such as available jobs and the requirements of those jobs, may change faster than others such as a kinship system or traditional values about families and work. "In societies which have experienced considerable change of life conditions we shall find, in context, kinds of human careers in which expectancies are regularly created only to be regularly defeated. We shall find kinds of people who are taught to look forward to a career which they are not allowed to fulfill.... There is an important inconsistency between the desires created and the realities that the social structure provides (Redfield, 1960a: 62). The resulting tensions may be hard for the culture to absorb or create seemingly dysfunctional patterns.

Finally, Redfield shows us the power of culture and influence of history on the present and future when he states: " and in every community, primitive or civilized, what most importantly surrounds and influences the people are the traditions, sentiments, norms, and aspirations that make up the common mental life. The world of men is made up in the first place of ideas and ideals." Kroeber used the word "ethos" to sum up the "total quality" of a culture," the system of ideals and values that dominate the culture and so tend to control the type of

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7 For example, the reed mats that once lined the ceiling of the tombs in the valley of kings persisted in ceiling design long-after Egyptians abandoned their use in construction, and Greek amphorae carried the design of handles long-after abandoning easily broken clay handles.

behavior of its members" and which are "what is sanctioned and what is not " (Redfield, 1960a:67-70).

By describing the ethos we are also describing what people construe as "the good life," a way of life that may differ markedly from one culture to another. Redfield notes that "Peasant activity too is so organized as to provide for what the people there accept as a good life. A structure of meanings gives the pleasure that comes from a life well lived with little. Satisfactions come from the exercise of unquestioned virtues and the enjoyment of one's own skills and the fruits of ones own labor (Redfield, 1960b:65, 71, 73). How people define what is good in life and what constitutes "the good life" greatly influences their aspirations and what they will work to achieve.

I think aspects of peasant culture can be seen in Tremont. It is a society powerfully affected by its relationship to summer visitors and an extraordinarily affluent summer community. The traditional values of family, land, work and conservatism, feelings of inferiority and reluctance to get ahead mark the "ethos" and define the "good life," the life worth working for.

Jules Henry: Expansiveness, Competition and Achievement

> Ours is a driven culture. It is driven on by its achievement, competitive, profit , and mobility drives, and by the drives for security and a higher standard of living. Above all it is driven by expansiveness. Drives like hunger, thirst, sex, and rest arise directly out of the chemistry of the body, whereas expansiveness, competitiveness, achievement, and so on are generated by the culture; still we yield to the latter as we do to hunger and sex.
>
> Henry, 1963:13

These derived needs, generated by the dominant American culture seem decreasingly able to satisfy emotional and intellectual needs, in fact they seem to suppress them. Having more things is only marginally satisfying , at best, but the margins fray when the economy fails to offers means to achieve these goals. As American families have sacrificed needs of their children for parenting, of friends, of community and other family members in an effort to acquire more, the American economy has relentlessly moved the fruits of such labors further and further across the table until they seem unreachable to many who assumed they would eat plentifully if they just worked hard enough.

Henry identifies two characteristics of a technologically "primitive" culture: outstanding among the differences between simpler societies and our own is the absence in the latter of what I call production needs complementarity and coincidence (Henry, 1963: 8) of needs with production to meet needs. In the simpler culture " one does not produce what is not needed; and objects are made in the quantity and at the time required." People live with a "fixed bundle of wants" which they can usually satisfy, except in times of famine, pestilence , war and other extreme affliction. 8 To some the psychic and social rewards of a "slower" lifestyle such as Maine seems to offer in "vacationland: the way life is supposed to be" seem increasingly alluring and they question their aspirations to professional and managerial careers based on long hours away from their families.

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8 Clearly, in many societies there are terrible problems in meeting basic needs. I am not promoting the continuation of such misery, simply suggesting that extreme materialism doesn't meet human needs either.

When we value ourselves based on what we have achieved, we run the risk of de-valuing ourselves when we do not think we have achieved enough. In a gesellschaft culture based on ascribed status and performance of relatively stable roles, rewards come to people because of the way they perform, not so much from what they perform. In other words, how someone does a job is critical, the job itself and status attached to that job is of less consequence to the individual and the community.

This in turn, means that the attraction of a gesellschaft culture as very strong to those who have experienced the strength of bonding and interaction within such communities. To someone "from away" the reluctance of Maine students to leave home for college outside of the state or for more lucrative and "important" jobs is strange and just another indicator of rural backwardness. However, to a Maine student, leaving home, extended family, neighbors, community, friends, the land and associations of a lifetime is deeply wrenching if not impossible.

Donna Deyhle: Cultural Grounding

Anthropologist Donna Deyhle has conducted extensive research with the Navajo. Writing in the *Harvard Educational Review* she points to issues that also affect students from traditional Maine. She sees her work as an extension of the work of Ogbu and Cummins, showing that

> "cultural difference theorists such as Cummins argue that cultural conflicts and other problems develop in minority classrooms

> because of the differences between students' home and school cultures. [While] Sociostructural theorists such as Ogbu argue that the explanations for minority school failure lie outside of the school itself, specifically in the racial stratification of US society and the economy.
>
> Deyhle, 1995: 406

Deyhle believes " that Navaho practices and culture represent a distinct and independent tradition," and that though Navajo do face a castelike minority status in the Anglo society, their culture has an integrity developed over a long time independently of white culture. Ogbu "believes it is possible for the culture of the student to be left "safely" at home so that his or her cultural identity can be disconnected from what occurs in school," Deyhle and I agree that this is done only with great difficulty and damage (Deyhle, 1995: 406-409).

The Navajo " are a conquered and colonized people who have successfully resisted assimilation" (Deyhle: 424). Unlike the minorities Ogbu describes, the Navajo enjoyed a long period of independence before being overwhelmed by Anglo conquerors and many (most) still live on land that has great meaning for them. " Indians started with everything and have gradually lost much of what they had to an advancing alien civilization" (Deyhle, 424). For them there is every reason to resist assimilation and work to preserve their cultural heritage.

I see similarity between the Navajo situation and the changes traditional people face in Downeast Maine. Mainers have had a long time to develop a culture with integrity and meaning. Though the "conquerors" may

arrive in sheep's clothing (by L. L. Bean) the spirit of the wolf lies just under the surface, though rarely acknowledged. The conquering takes economic and political form as outsiders are more able to buy the most desirable land, as they move in and take positions on school boards, zoning boards, as selectmen, political representatives, and members of charitable boards. They may do this out of eagerness to serve and share their expertise but as they begin to dominate schools and other institutions, they profoundly change a way of life.

For the Navajo and native of Tremont, remaining true to a way of life that has evolved over generations may be the desired goal, whereas Anglos and people "from away" see change as the destination. Teachers may see Navajo or Downeast values as baggage to be discarded along the road to progress, and blame parents for holding students back. In fact, what Deyhle , and others have found is that the more deeply ground and secure a student is in the native culture the better he or she may do in school. However, too often native values are disparaged and people in schools find it hard to understand why student return to the reservation or to Downeast Maine instead of pursuing careers in a city after graduating from college.

The answer in both cases is, I think, that life separated from their families, traditions and from what they value means less to native people living in gemeinschaft communities, than people from a gesellschaft society can comprehend. To the Navajo for example, the nuclear family seems cut off and living alone is itself a form of poverty they do not wish on anyone.

Like the Navajo, the native Mainer may have been placed in low track business or vocational courses and be poorly prepared for any but traditional jobs, the skills for which he or she has most likely learned form parents and other relatives. Sadly, although students may reject assimilation, they also reject "white man's education" so their options after school are severely limited. Deyhle discusses a cultural war between Anglos and Navajo in which whites maneuver Navajo into poor paying low-skilled jobs, in part by assuring that they are not prepared for anything better. Professional jobs, including teaching, are reserved for whites, which in turn helps perpetuate the status quo.

I do not know if this is the case on Mount Desert Island, however, I do know that Tremont school has a very high percentage of native-born Mainers teaching in the school which may be one reason for their relative success. Nor do I know if the Island schools have the "homogeneous" responses to native Mainers as Deyhle finds in Anglo dealings with the Navaho. It would be particularly interesting to do a study of low-SES native born students to determine how teachers react to the, However, I have in observation of elementary school classrooms in other island towns, be saddened to see teachers react harshly to children who seemed inattentive, disinterested in the schoolwork and even at a very young age alienated from what was going on in the class. And in all cases that I observed, the students were children of year-round families (Lawrence, 1995).

Deyhle begins her article with the comment of a student who was in the top ten percent of her graduating class and had turned down two scholarships to college. " If I go to college, I will get a job in the city and the I won't come back very often. When am I going to have time to spend with my grandmother learning about my culture?" (Deyhle: 403). Though a student from Downeast Maine might not think of learning his or her culture, she or he would feel many of the same tensions and ambivalence about going to college.

Many students and their families think that becoming educated necessitates going away. What we, and the Navajo, must convince ourselves and our children of, its that there are opportunities at home and that one can have the best of both worlds. IN this age of Internet communication, surely this becomes more feasible. As the Navajo Fire Chief Deyhle quotes suggests:

> There is a new life, forward to live in this here dominant culture. This is what I think. Our children need to go out and get the best they can. Go to school and college and get everything they want, and then come back here, to their homes, here between the four sacred mountains...But Navajo parents now have to tell their children to go out and get their education. To college. And graduate school. Ant then to come back home, where they belong. Here on this land. This is where they belong. They need to bring their education back here to the reservation , their home. Then we can be a whole people. (Deyhle: 423).

This is the same plea we read in Dr. Gordon Donaldson's essay " Growing Up Means Going Away" about students in "Sawyerville, Maine." Donaldson shows us that only 10% of students aspire to go away to earn a BA or advanced degree and to return bringing their new skills to their home community (Donaldson, 19).

We develop not only an individual personality, but take on a cultural personality as well. To the extent that the norms and values of the native culture are at odds with the norms and values of the encroaching dominant culture, people living between the two will suffer cognitive dissonance as they cross back and forth between the two. It is as if the two cultures are playing tug of war. The challenge then is to enable students to define their aspirations by integrating what they value in each.

CONCLUSIONS:

This is a study in process but I can draw, at least, hypothetical conclusions.

- The field of cultural anthropology can illuminate factors that affect the way students learn.
- Ethnography is a useful way to develop a portrait of a community and an understanding of ways in which a particular culture affects students in the community.
- Triangulating ethnography with a quantitative approach offers an important "check" on both methodology and results while offering useful data for interpreting the quantitative work as well as for developing policy.
- The work of theorists such as Tonnies, Shils, Redfield, Deyhle and Henry illuminates similarities and differences between rural and urban cultures and suggests routes for further research in rural education.
- The strength of rural schools comes in part from their close connection to their communities suggesting that to the extent they lose this connection they are weakened.
- In Tremont close connections between the community and the grammar school reflect the integrity and homogeneity of that community. Local culture promotes education through high school but does not value post-secondary education as highly. Students from Tremont do not fare as well at the consolidated high school as might be expected, in part because they do not

receive the same degree of support from parents and other relatives and in part because they do not receive the same degree of attention from teachers and administrators as they did while they were at the elementary school.

- Tensions divide year-round residents and summer residents or tourists.
- The availability of "inherited jobs" such as caretaking, fishing, deter some students from seeking post-secondary education.
- Cultural norms and values such as "what was good enough for my grandfather is good enough for my grandson" , "getting an education means going away" and the "way of life" the community offers influence students' decisions about post-secondary education.
- Cultural differences between some teachers and students make it harder for them to appreciate each other.

APPENDIX

This Appendix is intended to supplement information provided in the text in order to give a more complete picture of Tremont.

1. Historical Year-Round Population Trends: Tremont

2. Class of Worker

3.Valuation and Tax Spending

4. Average Selling Price of Residential Units

5. Drop-Out Rates for Mount Desert Island High School, Hancock County, Aroostook County and the United States.

5. Rates at which students from Mount Desert Island High School, Hancock and Aroostook Counties expressed their intention to pursue post-secondary education.

The first three tables are from the Tremont Comprehensive Plan, the third are fourth were created from data provided by the Maine State Department of Education.

Table A.1
Historical Year-Round Population Trends
Tremont

Year	Population
1850	1,425
1860	1,768
1870	1,822
1880	2,011
1890	2,036
1900	2,010
1910*	1,116
1920	1,029
1930	954
1940	1,118
1950	1,115
1960	1,044
1970	1,003
1980	1,222
1990	1,324

***NOTE:** Southwest Harbor split off from Tremont in 1905.
Source: U.S. Census Historical Records

Table B.2
Class of Worker, 1990
Employed Persons 16 Years & Over

	Tremont		County	
Category	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Private wage/salary	427	64.6%	10,283	66.8%
Gov't workers	63	9.5%	2,639	17.2%
Self-employed	171	25.9%	2,405	15.6%
Unpaid Family	0	0.0%	59	0.4%
Total	661	100.0%	15,386	100.0%

Source: 1990 U.S. Census, CPH-L-83, table 2

Note the very high percentage of self-employed workers in Tremont in relation to both the national and county percentages.

Chart from the Tremont Comprehensive Plan.

On a per capita basis, the 1994 property tax assessment in Tremont was $1,090. This is lower than the other MDI towns and Trenton. It is just slightly higher than the Hancock County average. This tax burden, however, does not fall solely on year-round residents since it is shared with non-resident tax payers and owners of commercial establishments.

Table M.2
Valuation and Tax Spending (Assessment)
Tremont, Southwest Harbor, Bar Harbor, Mount Desert, Trenton, and Hancock County

	1992 Population Estimate	1994 State Equalized Valuation	1994 Valuation Per Capita	1994 Tax Spending	1994 Tax Spending Per Capita
Tremont	1,394	$138,200,000	$99,139	$1,519,806	$1,090
Southwest Harbor	1,908	$209,050,000	$109,565	$2,886,800	$1,513
Bar Harbor	4,490	$481,100,000	$107,149	$6,459,892	$1,439
Mount Desert	1,896	$516,900,000	$272,627	$4,399,086	$2,320
Trenton	1,098	$107,500,000	$97,905	$1,220,327	$1,111
Hancock County	47,963	$4,411,400,000	$91,975	$51,081,828	$1,065

Source: Maine Bureau of Taxation, Municipal Valuation Statistical Summary

During the 1989-1994 period, tax spending in Tremont increased at an after-inflation rate of 23 percent (see Table M.3). This is slower than in any surrounding town except Southwest Harbor. These figures show that Tremont has managed to control spending in a difficult fiscal environment. The early 1990s was a time when state education aid was cut, making it very difficult for even the most fiscally cautious towns to avoid increases in spending.

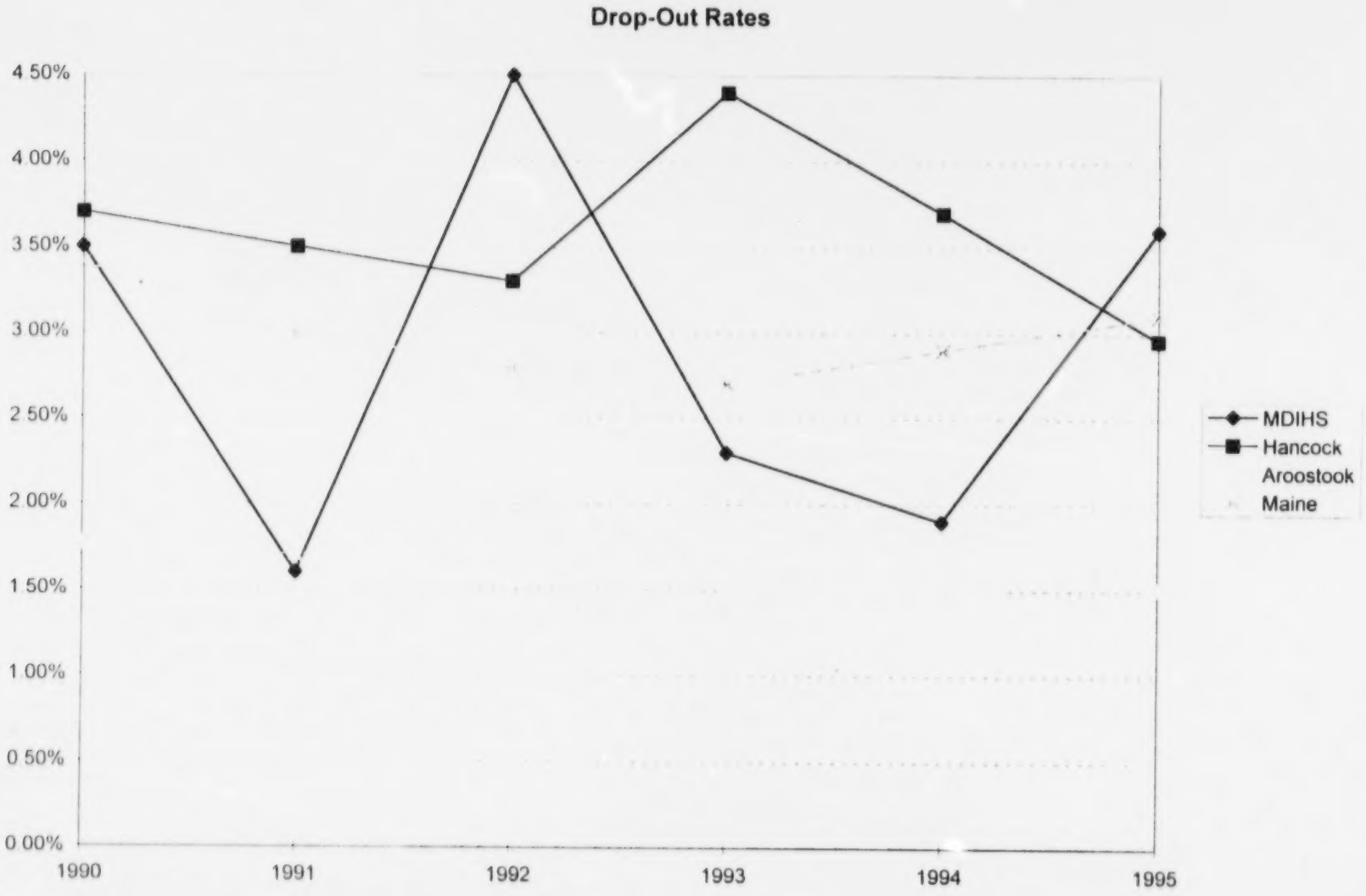
Table C.8
Average Selling Prices of Residential Units
Tremont and Hancock County, 1987-1991

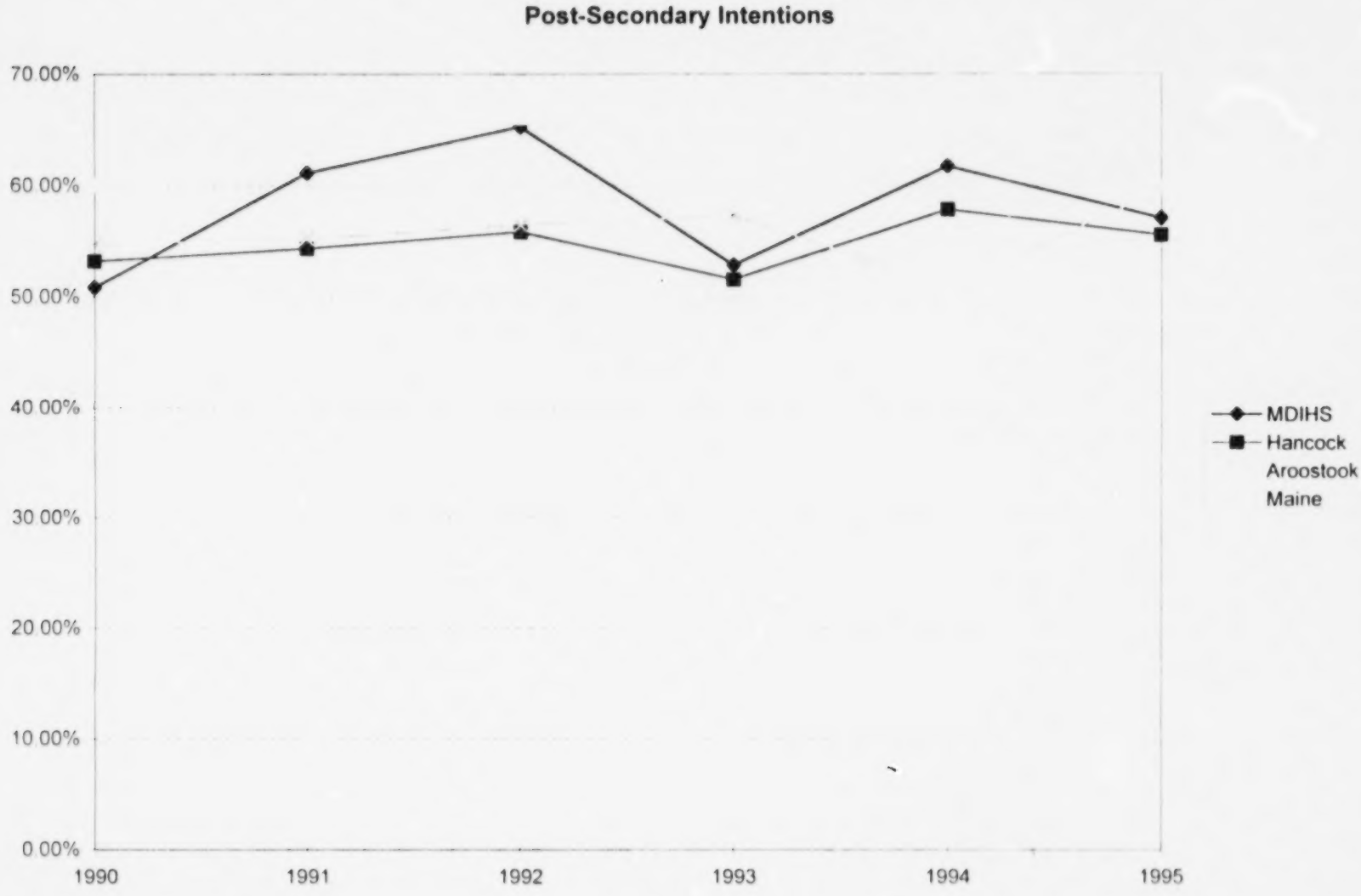
Year	Type of Unit	Sales Volume		Average Price	
		Tremont	Hancock County	Tremont	Hancock County
1991	Non-Waterfront	14	292	$100,625	$93,024
	Waterfront	3	105	$213,333	$150,966
1990	Non-Waterfront	17	491	$122,218	$105,258
	Waterfront	3	147	$310,000	$171,075
1989	Non-Waterfront	14	498	$101,286	$94,201
	Waterfront	3	171	$299,667	$197,619
1988	Urban	6	196	$99,833	$91,152
	Rural	16	399	$80,491	$76,277
	Waterfront	4		$294,000	
1987	Urban	1	142	$38,000	$85,075
	Rural	19	530	$61,889	$70,417

Source: Maine State Housing Authority, Real Estate Transfer Tax Residential Sales Information and sales ratio analysis from the Maine Bureau of Taxation.

6. Dwelling Unit Projections

The number of year-round homes needed in the future can be estimated by dividing the projected household population by the projected household size. Given the projected year-round population of 1,464 in 2002 and the projected household size of 2.27, there would be 645 occupied year-round units in Tremont that year. This would be a 16 percent increase (91 units) over the 554 occupied units in town in 1990.


Drop-Out Rates
4 50%
4 00%
3 50%
3 00%
2 50%
2 00%
1 50%
1 00%
0 50%
0 00%
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
MDIHS
Hancock
Aroostook
Maine


Post-Secondary Intentions
70.00%
60.00%
50.00%
40.00%
30.00%
20.00%
10.00%
0.00%
1990
1991
1992
1993
1994
1995
MDIHS
Hancock
Aroostook
Maine

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